The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

HOLBROOK LIBRARY
PACIFIC SCHOOL
OF RELIGION

No. 109 November 26th, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

Our debt to the Russian people is irrepayable. For six months at the cost of immeasurable and unimaginable suffering they have sustained with amazing fortitude the shattering blows of the most powerful war-machine the world has ever seen. Yet neither the depth of our gratitude nor the strength of the bond which unites us in common resistance to an intolerable evil does away with the fact that between our allies and ourselves there are differences on issues of the highest importance. The frank recognition of this fact will not weaken, but strengthen the bonds which unite us.

RUSSIA AND RELIGION

The Archbishop of York, in addressing his Diocesan Conference this month, spoke some wise and timely words about our relations with Russia. He said :—

"We watch with fascinated and deeply sympathetic admiration the heroic resistance of the Russian armies and people. Their cause is ours, and our cause is theirs. . . . But though there should be no hesitation in affirming our solidarity with Russia, and though I, for one, look forward to close co-operation with Russia in the organisation of peace, and the establishment of a co-operative commonwealth in Europe, yet this association inevitably brings problems which it would be foolish as well as wrong to ignore.

"The Russian Revolution was inspired by atheist philosophy. . . . The atheism of official Russia remains. Nor is there any equality between religious and anti-religious movements. For while there is freedom of worship, there is no freedom of religious teaching ; and there is both freedom and official patronage of anti-religious propaganda. The leaders of Russia are clear sighted, sincere and very able men. They do not expect us to pretend that their principles are other than they are ; nor will they respect us if we are false to our own. Let our co-operation in this mighty struggle rest on complete openness and mutual understanding."

According to an article in the constitution " freedom of religious worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda is recognised for all citizens." But the freedom of religious worship is rigidly restricted by law to gatherings for formal worship. It is only the anti-religious forces that may carry on propaganda. Religious associations are forbidden by law to form groups for any purpose, to organise special meetings for children, youth or women, to arrange for lectures or social gatherings, to give material aid to their members, to open libraries or reading-rooms, or to provide medical help. The publication of religious books and articles has for years been practically impossible in Russia, and all forms of evangelistic efforts are barred. Nothing is gained by blurring the fact that Soviet Communism is committed to a creed of scientific humanism which is hostile to every form of religious belief and places its entire confidence in the ability of man with his growing knowledge and out of his own social experience to create a good society. Not only is this the official view, but the whole resources of the State are devoted to securing its universal acceptance, making it the intellectual foundation of all social activities and eliminating all contrary or rival views.

These are the facts. In judging them four things have to be borne in mind.

The first is that the Church in Czarist Russia allowed itself to become the tool of a

tyrannical government and threw the mantle of religion over inexcusable crimes and grinding oppression ; and that in the activities of some of the sects, political aims are mixed up with religious motives.

Secondly, the Bolshevist Revolution cannot be judged externally simply as a fact, or merely as a reaction to the wrongs of the past. It is a definite and inescapable stage in Russian spiritual history. It took place because Russia was what she was, and represents a crisis in the working out of Russia's spiritual destiny, the full meaning of which no one can as yet apprehend.

Thirdly, the religious instinct is not easily eradicated. It belongs to the deeper layers of the mind, and it is often among peoples and classes that have not been over-intellectualized that it breaks out in new creative manifestations. It is not impossible that Russia, which has provided the supreme example in history of an atheist state, may in the future be one of the chief sources of religious life and inspiration. As has been pointed out in the News-Letter, there are already many signs of a new interest in Russian history and culture including its religious elements.

Fourthly, viewed from the religious standpoint, it is the strangest of destinies which has brought Russia, with its present atheistic philosophy, into the war on our side. If the Russians had thrown in their lot with Germany, the forces of irreligion would have gained a terrifying power. It has happened otherwise. The opportunity has been given to us to learn from the Russians by understanding the causes which have driven them to atheism, and to the Russians to learn from us, so that together we may rediscover the abiding values of the Christian tradition which is their heritage as well as ours.

THE CHRISTIAN WORKERS' UNION

Having learned a little about a new movement in the Church of England known as the " Christian Workers' Union," I wrote to Father Richard Roseveare of the Society of the Sacred Mission, who is in charge of a parish in a New Housing Estate in Sheffield and wrote a Supplement (C.N-L. No. 25) about its problems, to ask whether he could supply me with fuller particulars. I take the following from his letter.

The idea behind the movement is to take people *where they are* and try to work out both in study and in action the application of Christian principles to their particular state. If the witness of the Christian Faith is to penetrate the thickly populated industries of this country, the apostles who will lead this mission will certainly not be the clergy, but trained, keen, devoted, hard working, young Christian workers in their boiler-suits and overalls. The aim of the Christian Workers' Union is to relate rightly study, discussion and *action.*

It is often said that the Church has lost touch with the workers. If this means that the vast mass of workers have no connection with the church-going Christian community, it is unfortunately true. One reason may be that the life of the average congregation is too narrow, and concerned too exclusively with specifically religious activities, which seem to have little to do with that vast tract of industrial life with which the worker is concerned for most of his daily life. The question is whether there is anything that can be done within the range of ordinary " Church life " to show that Christ's Kingdom has to do with every department of human activity.

The Christian Workers' Union is a fellowship of young workers who, " take for their Leader, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Himself a workman in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth." The aims are :—

(1) To develop amongst young workers a sense of fellowship and an understanding of the dignity of work ;

(2) To show that work is not merely something to be endured in order to exist ;

(3) To help young workmen to find their real vocation instead of the first job offered ;

(4) To co-operate, wherever possible, with the authorities concerned with such matters ;

(5) By observation, prayer, and action to plan for steady progress in the conditions and standards of work.

The members of the Union, which is now finding its way into several parishes in big industrial centres, are ordinary young workers between the ages of 16 and 30. They have what they call a "priest adviser" attached to each group or section, but he does not run it. They are practising Christians ; a readiness to receive instruction in the Christian Faith is a condition of membership. This is normally given in a short talk by the priest adviser at each section meeting. The members meet in their sections once a week and, under the chairmanship of a young worker elected by themselves, carry out certain " enquiries " relating to their own life, e.g. to conditions of work, wages, hours of employment, juvenile employment, the practical working of factory acts, or how they got their present job. These subjects are studied over a period of weeks, and each member produces relevant evidence which he (or she) has gathered from workmates. They discuss the problems from a Christian point of view ; for instance, in regard to unhealthy conditions, whether such conditions are consistent with the dignity of the human nature which God has made and Christ redeemed.

Sometimes the enquiry produces evidence upon which action may be taken. A particular lad known to one of the members may be suffering from ill health or undue worry by reason of his job. Can something be done to help him to change it ? In these days of " essential " industries it is often difficult to effect such a change. The section can help by advising the lad what to do, by helping him to prepare his case, and by getting in touch with the local employment authorities. In spite of masses of excellent legislation it is often only by somebody being prepared to take a bit of extra trouble that the benefits of such legislation can be secured for the individual. Sometimes again the enquiry reveals a state of affairs in which action affecting a whole firm may be taken. A very careful investigation is made, facts marshalled, and a report sent to the management or perhaps to the chief factory inspector. Here again (as experience has proved) it is only because a few people care to take the necessary trouble that what may be a scandalous state of affairs can be brought to an end.

The members are encouraged to belong to Trades Unions where this is possible, and always to work through statutory or voluntary bodies, where they exist. But what they attempt arises directly out of their *observation* of facts, their *prayer* together as Christians and the *action* demanded by circumstances.

THE WAR EXPERIENCES OF A CHINA COLLEGE

The history of the pursuit of knowledge through the centuries contains many thrilling and fascinating episodes, but few stir the imagination more than the trek of China's Colleges across half a continent to carry on their educational task in safety and freedom from the invader.[1] None has had a more exciting experience than the Central China College founded and supported by Christian missions at Wuchang on the opposite side of the river from Hankow. Its President, Dr. Francis Wei, is well known to many in this country.

During the first year of the war with Japan, the College carried on in Wuchang. In the summer of 1938 it moved south to Kweilin, the provincial capital of Kwangsi. Shortly afterwards Canton was occupied by the Japanese. Air-raids were frequent and deadly, and two-thirds of the city were burnt. The staff and students of the College had to spend more time hiding in caves than in study. The second move was made in February 1939. The first flight had been mainly by China's inland water-ways, but in the second the members of the College were piled into trucks and rumbled over one of the new highways across great barren stretches of Kwangsi to the Indo-China border where they entrained for Hanoi, the gay little capital of Tonkin. From it they continued by train to the uplands of Yunnan, in the furthest south-west of China. After some delay in Kunming, the capital of the province, the College began the final stage of the journey along the

[1] A vivid picture of this trek to the West and its effects on the students, and of the struggle to maintain colleges and hospitals, is given in *Men Against the Sky*, by Winifred Galbraith (Jonathan Cape, 10s. 6d.).

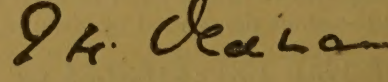
famous Burma Road to their new home at Hsichow, where they are nearer to Calcutta than to their original base at Wuchang.

Hsichow is a well-to-do little town which is only just beginning to be touched by modernity, and the College found itself in a new cultural as well as geographical environment, being planted down in the midst of a mediaeval civilization. The local gentry gave the newcomers a warm welcome, and allowed them the use of three contiguous temples. A number of temporary wooden buildings were run up to serve as laboratories, offices and class-rooms. The Confucian temple was turned into a library, the Buddhist converted into a Christian chapel and the third temple used as a faculty common room. The staff and students are housed in different parts of the village.

The isolation of the College is extreme. Kunming, when the College passed through it, was a thriving centre of communication, but since the Japanese invaded Indo-China, the only means of exit is by aeroplane. The College has to depend on obtaining both supplies and students mainly through Burma. Communication with Hongkong by post is barely possible and the College had to rely for world news on an old, not very efficient wireless-set. The present student body is small, for travel is difficult and the immediate environment very backward. Equipment is scanty and administration is made doubly difficult by the depreciation of the Chinese dollar. Care for the well-being of students whose families are hundreds of miles away is an additional responsibility for the staff. Yet a new sense of vocation and a new seriousness in study are markedly present and numbers of non-Christians show a spirit of sympathetic enquiry.

It is a fact of the greatest interest that what China is making such desperate efforts to preserve is not a part of her own indigenous culture, but knowledge that has come to her from the West. The universities, which so great a price is being paid to maintain, are in the main, foreign in their origin. The fact that the Chinese value so highly what has come to them from abroad is evidence that there is in Western culture an element of intrinsic and universal worth.

Yours sincerely,



Subscriptions—The rate of subscription to the News-Letter is 12s. 6d. ($3.0 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 6s. 6d. ($1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months. Back numbers—4d. each, 1s. 2d. for 6, 1s. 11d. for 12 copies. Post free.

Indices—Indices to Nos. 0-26, Nos. 27-52, and Nos. 53-78, 1s. each, post free. Index to Nos. 79-104 will be ready shortly.

Bound Volumes—Volume I (Nos. 0-26), Volume II (Nos. 27-52), Volume III (Nos. 53-78). Uniformly bound in green cloth with gold lettering and index, 8s. 6d. each, post free. Volume IV (Nos. 79-104) will be on sale in a few weeks' time.

Members' Copies for Binding—26 issues (Nos. 0-26 ; 27-52 ; 53-78 ; 79-104) bound in dark green board with black lettering, and appropriate index included : 2s. 6d. each volume, post free. Please send all binding orders by **December 1st**.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 21 NORTHMOOR ROAD, OXFORD.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by the Kemp Hall Press, Ltd., in the City of Oxford.